

Recognition and precarity of life arrangement: towards an enlarged understanding of precarious working and living conditions

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ABSTRACT



Precarity and precarious work are widely debated concepts, though a lack of clarity remains about its definition, dimensions and application. Recognition appears to be an illuminating concept for a deeper understanding of work and employment in times of precarity and its further effects, but has yet to be considered. The article aims to develop a multifaceted understanding of precarity for empirical research. Hence, *precarity of life arrangement* is introduced as a heuristic, though it is developed further on the grounds of theories of recognition. The conceptual enlargement of precarity of life arrangement, further developed by theories of recognition, is the outcome of the article. To demonstrate the concept's potential, of the spectrum of the empirical material of the study, the case of a couple in precarious working and living conditions is presented. Income and employment are important dimensions within the concept but are embedded in the life arrangement and hence intertwined with rights, love, participation, care, health and housing. The enlarged perspective developed in the articles stresses not only how precarity cumulates in life arrangement, but also gives insights into how precarity is mitigated and strengthened within the reciprocal relations of life dimensions and due to recognition (deficits).

KEYWORDS

Precarity; precarious employment; precarity of life arrangement; recognition; Honneth; gender; couple; Germany

Introduction

Precarity and precarious employment are widely debated concepts in social sciences, political debates and activism dealing with issues of welfare state transformation, work and inequalities (Bourdieu 1999; Castel 2002; Dörre 2006; 2015), poverty (Paugam 1996), migration (Anderson 2010), gender and care (Precarias a la deriva 2004; Fantone 2007; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2014) as well as the emergence of a new class and its political protest (Armano et al. 2017; Standing 2011). According to Castel (2002) and Bourdieu (1999), precarity describes a current condition shaped by insecurities generated by the rise of flexible and non-standard employment, which are significant trends in Western advanced capitalist

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societies (Kalleberg 2011; Vosko 2010). Precarity and precarious employment have existed since the beginning of paid employment in capitalist economies (Polanyi 1957). Hence, insecurities, which were thought surmounted with the so-called ‘golden age of capitalism’, have returned (Castel 2002). Precarious employment still follows an upward trend, whereas employment continues to have an *enormous individual and societal meaning*.

According to Honneth, the pronounced meaning of employment is related to it being a major source of recognition. Honneth (1995) assumes that humans have an inherent need and desire for recognition. In his tripartite model of recognition, he differentiates three ideal types of recognition: in the form of love in relationships with intimate partners, friends and family; recognition in the working sphere and employment where humans strive for recognition for their achievement; and last, legal recognition that fosters a perception of the self as a rights-bearing individual. Currently, achievement in the sphere of paid work is of greatest importance.

Additionally, little agreement exists on the effects and scope of precarity (Motakef 2015). First, to prevent a uniform conclusion from precarious employment to the lives of precarious workers, *subjective perceptions* are stressed. For example, for Kalleberg (2009, 2) precarious work includes ‘employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the workers’. Second, although many studies focus on the sphere of paid work, a key argument is the impact of precarity and precarious employment is not limited to that sphere, but includes other dimensions of social life, such as rights (Anderson 2010) and domestic work and care (Precarias a la deriva 2004; Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2014). By referring to concepts such as ‘precarious families’ (Pitrou 1978) or ‘precarious lives’ (Clement et al. 2009), the inclusion of further life dimensions is suggested.

Recognition appears to be an illuminating concept for a deeper understanding of the continuing importance of work and employment in times of precarity and further effects on love and rights. However, research on precarity and precarious employment has paid little attention to recognition, and it is unclear how precarity and recognition are linked to each other. Do precarious workers experience precarity in employment as a lack of recognition and if so, how? Referring to Honneth, how is (missing) recognition in employment linked to (missing) recognition in love and rights in the lives of precarious workers? Beyond Honneth, the question arises as to which further dimensions of life besides work, love and rights are of relevance.

Within our institutionalized recognition order, recognition is highly gendered and unequally distributed (Fraser 2003; Wimbauer 2012). Feminist scholars criticized research on precarity for highlighting precarious working conditions ‘only at the moment when the Western, male worker began feeling the negative effects of the new, post-industrial, flexible job market’ (Fantone 2007, 7). Because (unpaid) care work is still predominantly undertaken by women and remains largely un-recognized and under-valued, female lives are affected by precarity differently than male lives. Against this backdrop in German-speaking, gender-sensitive precarity research, the heuristic *precarity of life arrangement* (Prekarität im Lebenszusammenhang) has developed. Klenner et al. (2012) and Amacker (2014) use the concept to combine different life dimensions, including work, employment, care, health, social security and housing.

This article aims to develop a multifaceted understanding of precarity, an enlarged conceptualization for empirical sociological research interested in *subjective* perceptions and meanings of precarity and its *objective* dimensions. Hence, *precarity of life arrangement* is

introduced as a heuristic tool (Blumer 1954), but is developed further on the grounds of theories of recognition. The conceptual enlargement of *precarity of life arrangement*, further developed by theories of recognition, is the outcome of the article. To demonstrate the concept's potential, of the spectrum of the empirical material of the study, the case of a couple in precarious working and living conditions is presented.

Why do I present data of a couple? First, recognition theorists assume that subjects are not monadic individuals, but emerge from intersubjective recognition. Thus, intersubjective recognitions relationships, such as couple relationships, influence how individuals are exposed to, experience and cope with precarity. Second, feminist scholarship accentuates that a heterosexual couple is a microcosm of wider social structure, as it offers insights into the interactions and negotiations of couples, that is influenced and influences the reproduction of gender inequalities (Nyman et al. 2018). Considering a couple as a 'unit of investigation' (Allan 1980) provides an understanding of how gender and recognition play out on a microsociology level (Wimbauer 2012; Wimbauer and Motakef 2017).

The first section reviews existing efforts to understand better the effects and scope of precarity and introduces *precarity of life arrangement*. The second section develops the theoretical framework. Some key arguments from theories of recognition are introduced, but considerations on intersubjective recognition by Honneth are in the focus. The third section presents the methods and context of the study in which the concept was developed. In the fourth chapter, on the grounds of the heuristic *precarity of life arrangement*, the case of a couple in precarious working and living conditions is presented and discussed. The last section offers concluding reflections on the concept, its benefits, limits and further questions.

Precarity, precarious work and precarity of life arrangement

An expanding literature on precarity, precarious work and employment is concerned with the vagueness and challenge of applying such concepts in empirical research (Anderson 2010; Campbell and Price 2016; Potter and Hamilton 2014). It is easy to agree with Anderson (2010, 303), who sees a 'danger that the term can become a catchall, meaning everything and nothing at the same time'. As stated, recognition has not yet been considered systematically. Nevertheless, effort is put into defining and determining the effects and scope of the concept. For example, is precarity inevitably linked to insecurities in employment? Is employment the overarching dimension of precarity? If the scope of precarity goes far beyond employment, which dimensions of social life matter?

Precarity and precarious work

When it comes to precarity, rather broad approaches stem from philosophers such as Butler (2010), who has already connected precarity to recognition. She sees precarity as a general condition of bodily beings that are fundamentally exposed to the recognition of others. Butler calls this aspect 'precariousness',¹ as the precariousness of the subject. According to Butler, lives are therefore always precarious, even if political regulations can increase and mitigate precariousness; what she calls precarity. She asks, how 'norms operate to produce certain subjects as "recognizable" persons and to make others decidedly more difficult to recognize' (Butler 2010, 6). Therefore, the political regulation of precarity is intertwined with frames of recognition.

Referring to the man-made environmental destruction, anthropologist Tsing (2017) sees in precarity a modality of being, marked by the indeterminacy, which is less the exception than the condition of our time (Neilson and Rossiter 2008). As mentioned earlier, in sociology, precarity is understood as a condition shaped by insecurities generated by the rise of flexible employment (Kalleberg 2011; Vosko 2010).

It is striking that even attempts to define precarious employment include non-work-place characteristics: According to Vosko et al. (2009, 6) there are two main uses of precarious employment in empirical research. The first approach equates precarious employment with forms of non-standard employment, following an underlying dichotomy of standard and non-standard. Precarious employment is presented as one-dimensional, linked to a shortcoming in employment relations. In the second approach, precarious employment is introduced as a concept that captures multiple forms of insecurities in employment. In such an approach, following the acclaimed work of Vosko (2010, 2), precarious employment is defined as ‘work for remuneration characterised by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefit and statutory entitlements’. Interestingly, Vosko includes ‘*social context* (e.g. occupation, industry and geography)’ and ‘*social location* (or the interaction between social relations, such as gender, and legal and political categories, such as citizenship)’ in her understanding of precarious employment.

Precarious families and the interplay of work and family

One of the earliest sociological attempts to use precarity to investigate a social condition of insecurity and its effects on families and households was presented by Pitrou (1978). In her work on precarious families, several life aspects beyond merely employment were considered constitutive of precarity, including household dynamics, the uncertainty of the future, housing, health, number of children, welfare provision and intimate relationships. Clement et al. (2009, 241) define ‘precarious lives’ as composed of the contingent relationship between precarious work and life more generally and specifically, the existence, structure and accessibility of social support networks, be they personal or financial, private or state-organized, independent of any employment situation. Those who can avail themselves of such networks ‘buffer’ themselves against negative impacts of their working status. In the following, the authors discuss the methodical challenges of a comparison of the precarious lives of families in different countries based on statistical data.

Without directly connecting to precarity, but concerned with further effects of precarious work, Pugh (2015) offers insights of families exposed to insecurity in the USA based on in-depth interviews with mostly female working parents. After the experience of lay-offs or transfers, these workers pressure themselves to perform while expecting little of their employers. The demand for flexibility is perceived as threatening and requiring some manner of defence. Workers tend to ‘erect a moral wall, fending off the insecurity that they assume prevails there’ (Pugh 2015, 199). Female workers who were laid-off aimed for independence, thereby gaining distance between themselves and unreliable partners (including the state), focusing on self-fulfillment in their work.

The exploration of various dimensions of *precarity* is not entirely new, especially in migrant studies. Here, precarity in employment and income is linked to rights. Potter and Hamilton (2014, 393) stress that ‘precarity based on residency status makes people vulnerable to precarious employment’.

The interrelation of work and life is investigated in a research area that focuses on work-to-family conflicts and, somewhat less, family-to-work conflicts. Hochschild (1997) argued that work had become more attractive, offering recognition and self-realization, whereas home had lost attraction due to too many demands. However, apart from Hochschild, the literature on work and family conflict mostly deals with conflicts that occur when demands of work become incompatible with the demands of life (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). A strength of these studies lies in the differentiation of non-standard work conditions, such as self-employment (König and Cesinger 2015) or prolonged working time (Williams 2008), and their variant effects on families. However, the impression of life in these studies is too general for a better understanding of the matter, lacking further aspects such as intimate relationships or health. Furthermore, they do not capture the subjective meanings and perceptions of different spheres and dimensions.

To review, various studies on precarity have included life dimensions, but a systematic concept that captures the interplay of precarious employment and further dimensions of life is still missing, as are theories of recognition (with the exception of Butler).

Precarity of life arrangement

In German-speaking sociological approaches interested in gender and precarity research, the heuristic term *precarity of life arrangement* has been developed (Amacker 2014; Klenner et al. 2012). The feminist analysis points out a focus on male employment that ignores the gendered division of labour and the misrecognition of female care work. The article refers to *life arrangement* to highlight the complex dynamics of different dimensions of life. Precarious workers are coping with precarity in their practices of everyday-life in socially patterned ways. *Life arrangement* indicates a condition that is therefore socially shaped, but the agency is not understood to be totally determined (Jurczyk and Rerrich 1993). Klenner et al. (2012, 218) defined ‘precarity of life arrangement as an insecure and higher-risk condition, which encompasses not only destabilized the individual and family life, but also the loss of agency and the ability to make future plans’ (own translation). Klenner et al. (2012, 219) list dimensions such as income, work and general financial situation, gender arrangements, social security, care arrangements, children’s development, self-care, health and social integration. By applying the concept, the authors demonstrate *precarity of life arrangement* of female breadwinners in Germany. Although these women work full-time, housework and caring for the family remain primarily their responsibility due to their gender arrangements. *Precarity of life arrangement* is not only a result of precarious employment, but is grounded in contradictory logic and a double burden of paid labour and non-remunerated care work.

A further study in which the concept is applied has been presented by Amacker (2014). With *precarity of life arrangement*, she refers to Klenner’s definition but includes income, employment, education, health, housing, care, social network and social welfare as dimensions. She stresses that care and not precarious employment is a core dimension in the *precarity of life arrangement* of her sample of female breadwinners in Switzerland. Although some women in her sample had a stable employment situation, destabilizing factors concerning their *life arrangements*, such as separations, low level of education of new partners and the lack of recognition of non-EU-qualifications of new partners were

of greater relevance. Furthermore, she reported the profound importance of a social network for men and women with care responsibilities and those who needed care.

To summarize, several studies do suggest a variety of dimensions of social life. *Precarity of life arrangement* serves as a systematic tool to capture these dimensions and to highlight their *cumulative effects*. Although some studies refer to recognition in a non-systematic way, stressing the meaning of self-fulfillment in work (Pugh 2015) and denoting a lack of recognition of non-EU qualifications and female care work (Amacker 2014), theories of recognition have not yet been applied to the exploration of *precarity of life arrangement*.

Recognition and the tripartite model of recognition of Honneth

The elaboration of recognition has a long philosophical tradition. An important departure is the early work of *GFW Hegel*, who argued that only through recognition could a human being be constituted as a self. The meaning of intersubjective recognition for identity was further developed by *George Herbert Mead* and served as the inspiration for the work of scholars of various fields, including *Jessica Benjamin* (psychoanalysis) and *Charles Taylor* (political theory).

Today, recognition has advanced into a key concept within moral, social and political theory and social psychology. Following Hegel and Mead, *Axel Honneth* developed a theory of intersubjective recognition, which has been influential in sociology² and to which I refer in the following. In her ‘status model of recognition’, *Nancy Fraser* (2003, 29) has shifted the focus from intersubjective dynamics to social institutions and its gendered structure. In her framework, recognition and redistribution are categories to analyze forms of oppression, whereas gender ‘serves as a basic organizing principle of the economic structure of capitalist society’ and a ‘status differentiation as well’ (2003, 20). Although I assume intersubjective recognition relations with Honneth, I draw on Fraser’s claim, that recognition relations are gendered.

Recognition for love, rights and achievement

While the reliance on recognition is an anthropological constant, Honneth (1995, 2003, 2012) sees the society as an institutionalized *recognition order* that undergoes historical change. Historically, changeable norms determine who and what is recognizable and who and what is not.

Thus, Honneth (1995, 2003) differentiates between three ideal-typical forms and spheres of recognition: love (in the sphere of intimate relations), law (in the legal sphere) and achievement (within the system of the social division of labour).³ Achievement in the sphere of employment is of particular importance. The recognition form of love denotes ‘loving care for the other’s well-being in light of his or her individual need’ (Honneth 2003, 139). Honneth (1995) first focuses on parent–child love, but later differentiates the love sphere into intimate relationships, family and friendships (Honneth 2014). Legal recognition encompasses the universal respect of all moral persons. Thus, he differentiates between three groups of rights: liberal freedom, political participation and social welfare. Unlike in the sphere of love, the moral obligation is not particular but universal. Social esteem is historically variable, is paid primarily for individual achievement in the sphere of employment and does not aim – as ‘love’ – on the

whole person but only on aspects of the persons: in particular on achievement or what is socially valued as such. Drawing on Honneth, all three forms of mutual recognition are indispensable:

Taken together, the three forms of recognition (...) constitute the social conditions under which human subjects can develop a positive attitude towards themselves (...) that a person can come to see himself or herself, unconditionally, as both an autonomous and an individuated being, and to identify with his or her goals and desires. (Honneth 1995, 169)

This would be jeopardized, if recognition fails to appear in a sphere, such as recognition for achievement in the sphere of employment due to precarity.

However, ideologies of recognition exist if the act of recognition remains incomplete only on a symbolic level but is not materially institutionalized (Honneth 2012). Ideologies of recognition do not aim to develop positive self-concepts, but rather conformity and submission.

Honneth has been criticized for overlooking power (McQueen 2015). To McNay (2008, 135), power relations are ‘viewed as *ex posteriori* effects of a fundamental psychic dynamic’. Different to Honneth, Judith Butler (1997) sees recognition as strongly bound with power, therefore inherently bearing both positive and negative effect potential (McQueen 2015). In her theory of subjectivation, she stresses the ambivalence of recognition. Through recognition, subjects are not affirmed positively in what they already are, but rather they are produced as such by powerful norms of recognizability. Moreover, Fraser has further criticized Honneth for mystifying the gendered structure of recognition.⁴

Bearing the critics in mind, the article elaborates that tripartite model of recognition of Honneth (1995, 2003, 2004) offer fruitful starting points for empirical research on *precarity of life arrangement*. In my understanding of recognition, I therefore follow Honneth in his claims that subjects are constituted through intersubjective recognition and recognition order determine who and what is recognizable and who and what is not. However, instead of assuming that recognition for love, rights and achievement is the necessary condition for a subject’s positive self-regarding attitude, I suggest empirical investigations. Hereby, I refer to Fraser (2003), that recognition is gendered and to Butler (1997) and her considerations on the ambivalence of recognition and power.

Recognition and the dimension of precarity of life arrangement

In the following, I present the conceptual enlargement of the concept. The enlargement was developed iteratively from sensitizing concepts (recognition theory and precarity research), the grounded analysis of the empirical material and its further theoretical reflections (Wimbauer and Motakef 2019). It is thereby a product of a non-linear and recursive research process (Flick, von Kardorff, and Steinke 2004). The broadening of *precarity of life arrangement* is framed by three perspectives (Wimbauer and Motakef 2019):

- (1) Referring to Honneth (and Butler) the *recognition order* is at stake. What are the normative and institutionalized ‘recognition order’ (Honneth) or ‘frames of recognition’ (Butler) such as norms of the work society and the adult worker model or norms of heterosexuality and coupledness? Who experiences recognition as problematic, why and based on what norms?

- (2) Referring to Honneth, intersubjective recognition relations are put into focus. What (kind of) recognition do precarious workers strive for, and in which spheres/dimensions? What recognition do they manage or fail to gain? Which (gendered) structural barriers have which restricting effects (Fraser 2003)?
- (3) Referring to the precarity debate, the coping and experience of a precarious situation is at stake. How does precarity affect the agency, plannability and autonomy of precarious worker?

Drawing on Honneth, rights and love are included as two further dimensions. The dimension of love raises the question: What do subjects strive, manage or fail to gain intersubjective recognition for in their love relationships with intimate partners, family and friends? Which norms in love make subjects recognizable, such as heteronormativity? How are gender relations organized? The dimension of rights spans from social security and welfare to citizen rights, such as rights of residence. Who is recognized by socio-political institutions? Whom feels addressed and entitled to rights? Whose rights are not recognized, and based on what norms?

The other six dimension are taken from the literature presented (Amacker 2014; Klenner et al. 2012). They include (1) employment, (2) income, (3) right, (4) love, (5) participation, (6) care and housework, (7) self-care and health and (8) housing.

Similar to precarious employment in Vosko's (2010) sense, the presented concept does not reproduce a dichotomy of work and life. Rather, it opens a continuum of several dimensions of life, highlighting subjective perceptions and meanings and their objective foundations. Although a recognition-based *subjective* perspective is a strength of the concept, *precarity of life arrangement* is not limited to that, as many life dimensions have subjective and objective aspects. Income, for example, refers to a material-reproductive dimension: Can the income meet the cost of living? Then again, it includes the subjective perception of the income as appropriate to achievements at work and enabling a life with dignity. To give another example, employment refers to the recognition workers strive for and obtain due to their achievement in an institutional and juridical sense, such as contracts, working conditions; however, it also includes socio-communicative elements, such as the meaning of work, or intersubjective recognition in relations with colleagues and supervisors. In the dimension of participation, it is not only asked if workers participate, but whether workers feel recognized by their degree of participation.

Previous research has demonstrated how loads can have cumulative effects in the life arrangement of precarious female earners (Klenner et al. 2012; Amacker 2014). Against the backdrop of a recognition perspective, the article suggests the consideration of *various dynamics of recognition relations*. Recognition and its missing is not inevitably only empowering or destructive in precarious life conditions. Furthermore, precarity and recognition are bound into each other in various, contradicting and complex dynamics. Thus, precarity based on a lack of recognition in work can be mitigated or further strengthened by (a lack of) love recognition. However, it is not assumed that a lack of recognition can be fully compensated by love recognition because the logic of recognition within the spheres and dimensions differ.

In the following, the conceptual potential will be demonstrated by an empirical example of a joint couple interview. This interview was chosen out of the spectrum of the cases

because it demonstrates how the partners are mutually inhibiting, but also enabling themselves to recognition.

Methods and context of the study

The empirical research on which the conceptual broadening is based was undertaken through semi-structured interviews with a sample of one-on-one interviews with eight singles (four women, four men) and eight joint interviews (Allan 1980) (seven heterosexual, one homosexual) followed by six one-on-one interviews with partners of three couples six months later. In total, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted in four German regions, mainly large towns (one East German region, three West German regions).

The survey instruments combined the advantages of qualitative narrative and thematic interviews. In addition, sociodemographic and life course data were collected with questionnaires as supplementary information. Sample criteria were precarious employment, which was specified as not being in a standard employment relation in at least one of the following criteria: part-time, temporary work and flexible working hours. Further sampling criteria were low income (max 60% to 80% of the median national equivalent income in Germany) and age between 25 and 50 years. Only mid- and long-term precarious workers were included, set at a minimum period of three years in precarious working conditions or unemployment.⁵ Interviews lasted from three to five hours. The interviews investigated if and how interviewees seek, manage or fail to gain recognition in dimensions such as employment, intimate relationships with partners, family and friends and the welfare state. The study aimed to understand the interplay of precarious work and intimate (couple) relationships, the context of their household and other areas of life.

In addition, joint interviews gave further insights into negotiations, couple performances and presentations (Allan 1980; Valentine 1999). Personal data was changed to maintain privacy. Considering the tradition of social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1967) and hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (Hitzler et al. 1999), data interpretation was subject to hermeneutic group interpretation sessions. Therefore, interviews were interpreted in a multi-stage process, sequentially and extensively, line-by-line or even word-by-word and elaborated case studies using hermeneutic sequence analysis were composed.

The interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2016. Like other European countries, Germany recently underwent extensive labour market reforms from 2003 to 2005, in which obstacles to 'atypical' employment relations were slowly dismantled, leading to a more pronounced labour market divide (Dörre 2015). A decline in unemployment and further expansion of atypical employment followed. In fact, atypical employment rose to over one-third of the entire job market (Keller and Seifert 2013; Knuth 2016).

Recognition and precarity of life arrangement – empirical illustration

In the following, the article provides an example from a joint interview to illustrate the potential of the heuristic tool *precarity of life arrangement*, which has been expanded on the grounds of theories of recognition. In the sample of the couples, three patterns were found concerning how recognition and *precarity of life arrangement* are linked. In the first pattern, 'the strong couple', couples managed to mitigate missing recognition

in work by mutual love recognition within their couple relationship. In the second pattern, 'the ambivalent couple', the couple relationship has become a precarious resource for recognition. Hereby, the partners differ in their recognition chances and therefore how they are affected by precarity. In the third pattern, 'the weak couple', the partners mutually inhibit themselves to gain recognition. Missing love recognition further cumulates the precarious condition.

To highlight how the partners differ in their individual precarity of life arrangement on the one hand and to show how they are inhibiting but at the same time enabling themselves to recognition on the other hand, the conceptual potential will be demonstrated by an empirical example of an 'ambivalent couple'.

Caroline and Clemens: a precarious female breadwinner arrangement

Caroline and Clemens, both in their late-40s, have two teenage children together and live in a large German city. At the time of the interviews, they had been living together for 16 years. They live in a female-earner arrangement, which is still not common in Germany today, even though the number of female breadwinners is increasing (Klenner et al. 2012).

Clemens was trained as a plumber. He could not find a job in his field of expertise, but was employed mostly in temporary jobs in other sectors and was unemployed for several periods (dimension 1. employment). However, he did not regret not having a successful professional career; on the contrary, in his periods of unemployment, he was involved in various local cultural and political projects. 'I could live easily without work, because I have things to do, they keep me busy', he told us. He emphasized several times that work was not of high importance to his identity. He insisted that he refused to judge people according to their work. At the time of the joint interview, he was running a small café by himself, which required long working hours but yielded no income. He took over the café from a friend and had no experience in the field. Only rarely did he have paying guests – most of the guests were his friends.

Caroline earned the family's income and had often done so in previous years (dimension 2. income). Caroline has a master's degree in media and communication and has always wanted to work as a journalist. She was employed at a newspaper in her field of expertise on a freelance basis, but because of enormous restructuring and redundancies in journalism, she lost the job. After a period of unemployment, she was offered to work on a freelance basis for the same newspaper again, but on local topics in remote areas (dimension 1. employment). Caroline stressed that she enjoyed working and undertaking activities with other people, but she suffered due to bad working conditions. At the newspaper company, everybody feared being the next person to be dismissed, so each accepted long working hours without extra payment and an increase in workload without complaint, she told us. Although she was proud to have stayed, she felt like a second-class worker from working freelance for such a long time and for not having worked in her field of expertise again. She felt trapped, being too old to switch to another newspaper or change professions.

Both partners experienced a lack of recognition at work, at least in objective dimensions, such as contract and working hours. Caroline strived for recognition for her achievement and was very committed, but she lacked recognition. In her view, her

supervisors did not see her achievements and therefore no careers options were given to her. She only maintained her employment situation because of economic need.

In contrast, Clemens presented himself as somehow resistant to missing recognition in employment. The fact, that Caroline has a higher education than Clemens could be an explanation as to why she intensively lacks recognition at work, whereas missing recognition at work seems not to be a burden for him. In a further reading, the devaluating of work of Clemens serves as a masking strategy; he could mask the gendered expectation of male breadwinning, which he cannot realize. In this sense, the devaluation of work helped him not to appear as a failed male earner within the joint interview.

Both agreed that their financial situation has worsened over the years (dimension 2 income). They still had very little money, but costs were rising such as rent and school transit fees. It was not Clemens fault that he earned no money, it was the circumstances, he explained. Over the years, it has become harder and harder to earn money. Caroline repeated that she always worried whether they had enough money for their children, whereas Clemens stressed that he needed little money anyway. When asked what it meant to have a family under these circumstances, he answered that they would qualify for social benefits (dimension 3. rights).

In the years that both were unemployed, the couple had to claim social benefits. In the memory of Caroline, it was a dehumanizing experience. She was asked why she had two children knowing she could not feed them anyway, she told us. She decided that she never wanted to depend on the federal employment agency again. However, Clemens still feels entitled to social benefits and he repeatedly reminded her she could stop working, which she refused to consider. In his presentation, Clemens managed not to experience his lacking income as a lack of recognition, which further leads to non-recognition of Caroline's breadwinning; an argument I will elaborate in the following.

When asked what they felt loved and recognized for by their intimate partners, Clemens answered that he felt loved by Caroline's acceptance of his café. Although he earned no money, she understood its importance to him. Caroline answered that she did not feel loved for a special reason, but stated they fit well with each other and she liked Clemens for being an unpredictable maverick. In an interpretation, in recognizing Clemens for being unconventional, she also recognizes his needs for his individual freedom in their common family life. On the other hand, in doing so, she 'accepts' his lack of responsibility, which in consequence reinforces her burdens.

At a later point in the joint interview, Clemens insisted that he did not want to listen to Caroline when she came home in the evening and complained about her working conditions. She replied that she sometimes needed someone to listen to her – after complaining, she could forget. One reading of this interaction is that again Clemens refuses to recognize Caroline for her commitment and achievement despite bad working conditions. The following interaction provides a further example. When asked if and how they valued each other's employment, they answered:

- Clemens: You need work. Well, I think she identifies with work more than I do. (...) It is true that she feels responsible for earning money, but (...) even if she could choose, you would continue working there. (...) You need your work.
- Caroline: It is not true. I would do something different. Something I like (...)
- Clemens: No, never.
- Caroline: Yes. (...) If it were possible financially, I would work less.

Clemens: It is not sufficient anyway. It doesn't matter anyway. We are different and she needs her work even if she is complaining.

An interpretation of this interaction is that Clemens naturalizes Caroline's effort into something inherent to her character, whereas she insists that she would like to work less, which he rejects in return. By naturalizing Caroline's efforts to work, Clemens undermines the basis of her appeals for recognition and support. He does not value that she earns the family's money, but accuses her of a bad breadwinning performance.

Both partners were involved in local environmental projects on a volunteer basis for many years (dimension 5. participation). In the past, they often organized projects together, which they both appreciated very much. Nowadays, they do not have time for volunteer work. When asked what work meant to them, Caroline referred directly to the volunteer work she was doing. There was pride in her voice when she told us of an environmental project she organized. There she was doing meaningful work, she said. Clemens agreed he was proud to be known for his activities in the neighbourhood.

In my reading, participating in local projects helped Caroline to mitigate missing recognition at work. For Clemens, opposed to employment, volunteer work was a sphere in which he strived and gained recognition for achievements. However, at the time of the interviews, they both felt prevented from doing volunteer work. Caroline had to earn money and could not reduce her working hours. Regarding Caroline's desire to do volunteer work as stated above, she accused Clemens of impeding her though she had to earn the family's income and could not reduce her employment. For his part, Clemens felt the need to further set up his café.

Currently, their teenage children no longer need care (dimension 6. care) so they were asked how they remembered their care situation when their second child was born. Clemens had just started working for a friend's laundry service. Caroline had just started working for the newspaper, so her friends and sometimes Clemens' mother supported the family. Caroline recalled that it was 'extremely arduous. I was in a hurry the whole day. I had to drop off the oldest at the kindergarten, at the same time the baby was sleeping'. Clemens did not support her story; on the contrary, he tried to emphasize his agency in caring for the children, which she found overstated:

Clemens: I went out with our daughter. It was me who dropped her off at kindergarten.

Caroline: Very rarely.

Clemens: (...) Anyway, it was ok.

In their interaction, Clemens tried to emphasize his agency in caring for their children, whereas Caroline refused to build a myth of his agency in care in return. One reading is that again he does not recognize what she has accomplished.

Discussion

The article has developed the argument that *precarity of life arrangement* includes subjective perceptions and meanings on objective grounds. In this vein, the case shows exemplarily that although both partners are exposed to precarious employment and income in objective measures, they differ in whether they perceive their employment and income as precarious. Hence, precarity in one or more dimensions of life does not automatically lead to a lack of recognition. Caroline has poor working conditions, a temporary contract

and a low wage, whereas Clemens is self-employed and has no income. While she lacks recognition for her employment, she associates meaningful work with her social and cultural projects. Clemens presents himself to be 'resistant' to missing recognition and therefore does not experience a lack of recognition at his employment. In addition, the café offers him intersubjective recognition as he meets his friends there. In Clemens' case, his work in the café blurs the borders between employment, love (recognition of friends) and participation. In a reading, I argued that his resistance to missing recognition is a presentation that serves as a masking strategy; he could mask that he cannot realize the gendered norms of male breadwinning.

Furthermore, the case of Caroline and Clemens reveals that the partners not only differ in their perception of their precarity, but also in the manner they are exposed to *precarity of life arrangement*. Considering dimensions such as employment, income, participation and love, an ambivalent couple dynamic becomes obvious, which particularly deteriorates the life arrangement of Caroline while she enables Clemens to individual freedoms. Hence, her precarious condition is exacerbated by her couple relationship, in which she does not receive recognition for being the female breadwinner. One reading is that Clemens does not see Caroline's need but naturalizes her need to work. Moreover, in Caroline's view, Clemens prevents her from doing volunteer work – where she would gain recognition for her achievements – by relying on her income; thus, she cannot work less to have time for other pursuits. Indeed, she had to bear the double burden of paid work and care (which she mainly provided) when their children were small. However, gendered norms are at play that inhibit Caroline's gain of power due to her earner role and help Clemens retain power within the couple relationship, although he does not contribute to the family's income (Koppetsch and Speck 2014).

On the one hand, the 'resistance' to missing recognition for achievements exacerbates Caroline's precarity, as argued. On the other hand, it is also Clemens' 'resistance' to missing recognition, or at least his presentation as such, that makes him attractive to her – as she asserted, she liked him for being an unpredictable maverick.

In sum, the case illustrates that precarious employment and income have a pivotal meaning, but it is not the sole dimension of *precarity of life arrangement*. The various dynamics and interplays within *precarity of life arrangement* are illuminating in understanding the insecure conditions of precarious workers.

Conclusion

In sociology, especially in the sociology of work and inequality, flexibility and insecurity are already broadly debated concepts. Hence, one could question the further benefit of a precarity perspective. The strength lies not in a new umbrella term that obscures the nuances, but in converging recognition, precarious employment and further dimensions of life, which are divided or even excluded otherwise. Therefore, the article introduced *precarity of life arrangement* as a heuristic tool, though it was developed further on the grounds of theories of recognition, to comprehend the ambivalences and complexities of the working and living conditions of many in advanced capitalist societies.

According to Honneth, in times of precarity, the immense meaning of work for individuals' identities has not decreased. A recognition-based approach, therefore, helps to capture subjective perceptions and meanings of precarious work and further dimensions

on objective grounds, helping prevent a uniform conclusion from precarious work to the lives of precarious workers. Thus, precarity has not only a recognition dimension, but also can be understood as a lack of recognition in multiple ways. Hence, precarity and precarious employment do not inevitably lead to deficits of recognition. In the case presented, Clemens portrayed himself as one who does not experience a lack of recognition. Caroline could mitigate missing recognition for achievement at her employment with recognition in her volunteer work. Moreover, even non-precarious workers can be exposed to deficient recognition in employment as well (Wimbauer 2012). Nevertheless, precarious employment potentially risks a variety of deficits in recognition: Trapped in temporary or part-time work, being a contract-worker or having a low income can encroach on one's possibilities to realize their skills, abilities and talents. Indeed, women are often in precarious employment because they bear the chief responsibility for elder or childcare work.

The article advances the argument that employment is not the only dimension shaping a precarious condition. Embedded in *life arrangements*, a more precise understanding of the *destabilizing and stabilizing* effects of employment and further dimensions, such as love, but also care, health, rights and participation, can be uncovered.

Although recognition-based research in precarity is still in its infancy, open questions persist. As *precarity of life arrangement* has been applied predominantly in studies on female breadwinners, it is important to ask what can be learned from exploring the *life arrangements* of further empirical groups as well as which further sources of recognition appear in empirical research that were not yet included?

Notes

1. See also the considerations of Martha Fineman (2008) on the 'vulnerable subject'.
2. See for example (Voswinkel 2012; Wimbauer 2012).
3. Although Honneth (1995) refers to solidarity as the third form of mutual recognition, he reinterprets this sphere in a later work as individual achievement in the system of division of labor (Honneth 2003).
4. In the words of Fraser: 'What Honneth calls affective care is actually women's labor, ideologically mystified and rendered invisible' (Fraser 2003, 220).
5. Initially, precarious workers with higher education were excluded, considering that a low level of education is a key risk factor for precarious employment. Because of recruiting difficulties, three singles and three partners of the couples with university degrees were included.

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